



Restaurant Review

APPLE-A-DAY CAFÉ (ISLAND DRUG'S LUNCH COUNTER)

A BLAST FROM THE PAST

By Helen Bates

Over the years, Island Drug has become an Oak Harbor landmark. Today in their brand new building, it is still attracting people. This is due, in part, to the addition of the Apple-A-Day Café, an old fashioned soda fountain and lunch counter.

To those of us of a certain age, this new feature conjures up memories of long-ago visits to an old Woolworth or Kress lunch counter. Looking back, it seems the lunches or ice cream treats we enjoyed there were the highlights of any downtown shopping trip.

I am sure there are other people on Whidbey who can identify with this. In the "good old days," most cities or towns of any size supported at least one of these precursors of fast-food restaurants. If a town did not have a five and dime store, they usually had a drug store with a soda fountain.

With the advent of the Apple-A-Day Café, we islanders now have the best of both worlds. We can stop by for a light lunch or just to cool off with a fountain treat. Now that I have done both several times, I can announce that the new café is definitely a bright spot in the new Island Drug.

Located back near the pharmacy, a long counter is paired with twelve seats. An old-fashioned soda fountain is off to one side. A full service counter covers the back wall. Now, due to the terrific response from the public, the seating capacity has already been enlarged with the addition of two tables and eight chairs. This is a good thing.

The first time we visited the new drug store all the seats at the counter were occupied. People were smiling, talking and thoroughly enjoying themselves. No one seemed to be in a hurry to leave, so we decided to return at another time.

My "another time" turned out to be several days later. As I was running errands around town and celebrating the beautiful day, I realized it was warmer than usual and I had developed a thirst. My thoughts turned to the soda fountain! The timing was perfect. It was after lunch and when I arrived, there were only two other customers at the counter.

Taking a seat, I asked the woman behind the counter if they served old-fashioned ice cream sodas. My answer was a smiling Suzie Bartlett handing me a menu. The menu invited the customer to "shake it up," and I decided to do just that. The list showed a full complement of ice cream selections I remember from my childhood. It didn't take long for me to know exactly what I wanted.

My choice was a chocolate ice cream soda. But I had a variety of treats from which to choose. As I perused the menu, I noticed they also served ice cream shakes, malts, sundaes, banana splits, as well as pies or brownies ala mode - or not. When my soda arrived, it was replete with a cherry on top plus another cup of soda to add as needed. The good old days had returned!

A chalkboard on the back wall listed the specials of the day. That Thursday's special was an Italian meatball sub on a hoagie; Friday's was homemade mac and cheese with a dinner salad. Starting a week later, their website announced that the café would begin offering lunch favorites on certain days of the week. On Mondays they will be serving open face hot turkey sandwiches; on Fridays, hot meatloaf sandwiches. Both of these come with mashed potatoes and gravy. On Wednesdays my favorite, the classic BLT, bacon, tomato and lettuce sandwich will be featured.

One day the soups of the day listed were homemade turkey and wild rice and curry and chicken. On another visit I had some zesty tomato and basil soup. It was outstanding. On another visit, the soup choices of the day were coconut curry and cheddar cauliflower. The coconut curry was over and above any soup I've ever had at a lunch counter, but it should have had at least two stars by its name. I could go just for the homemade soup everyday.

This is not too surprising as the cafe is managed by Vicka Haywood, who has her own catering business and has earned a great reputation around here for her culinary skills. Many people who have eaten at the yacht club have sampled her excellent cuisine. Besides being a delight to know, she is also a very hands-on manager who takes pride in not only her cooking, but, also, in her team at the Apple-A-Day Café.

Vicka is also proud of her wide-ranging menu. Featured sandwiches include "The Turkey Stack," "Hot Rod Club," "Rockin' Ruben," "The Ham Stack," "The New Yorker," "Roasted Beef Stack," and "Vicka's Egg Salad." Sandwiches come with your choice of bread and cheese, as well as your choice of chips, potato or pasta salad. Please note: The pasta salad is not the bland macaroni salad one usually finds accompanying a sandwich. Vicka's pasta salad is a gourmet version of an Italian deli salad replete with plum tomatoes, salami and mozzarella cheese finished with a zesty vinaigrette. Even with a delicious extra, no sandwich costs more than \$8.50.

Half sandwiches are also available, which is a good thing, as the humongous full-sandwiches are really enough for two. When my husband ordered a half "Hot Rod Club," he could hardly finish it. When he asked, he was assured they do not make quarter sandwiches. But gluten-free options may be requested.

As mentioned above, soups vary with the day, but clam chowder is available only on Friday. Cups of soup range in price from \$1.95 for soup to \$2.50 for chowder. Bowls run from \$2.25 for the soup to \$4.25 for the chowder.

At the time of this review, salads on the menu include the "Heart and Soul" salad made of assorted greens, cranberries and Blue cheese crumbles. The "Step-by-Step" chef salad includes mixed greens topped with ham, turkey, roast beef, and Swiss cheese, along with tomatoes and hard boiled eggs. For the lighter appetite, a smaller salad is offered called the "Hey Little One" dinner salad. But keep checking the menu, new salads can appear at any time. All salads come with your choice of dressing and range in price from \$4.50 to \$9.25.

Of course, there is a full beverage menu. And, believe it or not, but self-serve coffee is absolutely free! And did I mention desserts? A variety of homemade pies is usually available, such as apple, berry and strawberry. And don't forget the ala mode, as the full soda fountain can dish up nearly any combination you might desire.

Is there any wonder that the lunch counter was crowded the first time we dropped by? There is no doubt in my mind that this unique café and soda fountain is a welcomed addition to our island. There is also no doubt that the Apple-A-Day Café will be around for years to come. But, as I always say, don't take my word for it. Go check it out for yourself! You will probably meet your neighbors there!

The only negative thing I might add is a warning: Be careful. Visiting the Apple-A-Day Café just might become habit-forming! At least it is for this reviewer!

Their hours are Monday through Saturday from 11:00am to 5:00pm, Sunday from 11:00am to 2:00pm. The café is located in the new Island Drug at 32170 SR 20. The café's direct phone number is (360)679-3219. Find up-dated information on their website: www.islanddrug.com.

Our rating: ***** \$

***** = Love it, will go as often as possible!

**** = One of our go-to places.

*** = An okay place maybe lacking in some area.

** = If it's the only place open!

* = No way would we return!

\$\$\$\$ = \$25 and over

\$\$\$ = \$15 to \$25

\$\$ = \$10 to \$15

\$ = Under \$10